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Agenda item 11

MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION AND ENSURE THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF ALL MIGRANT WORKERS

Written statement submitted by United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[26 March 1997]

1. United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation has consistently shown its interest in the problems of migrant workers. This question is in fact at the very heart of our concerns regarding economic development. Agenda item 11 is indissociable from both the question of the transfer of competence and questions relating to North-South cooperation.

2. We should like briefly to recall our statement made to the Sub-Commission in August 1996 in which we spoke about the often precarious nature of migrant workers' employment, which does not conform to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in one or more respects such as job security, working conditions, social rights, family unity.

3. In addition to these observations, we wish today to make our albeit humble contribution to the study of measures to improve the working and living conditions of migrant workers.

4. Migrant workers are often seen in the host country as "supernumeraries" who are tolerated out of moral, legal or economic necessity. Quite apart from any humanitarian considerations, this view is archaic and false! For in our

profit and consumption-oriented society, the migrant worker must be seen as an economic engine, as a factor in the creation of wealth who produces (by his work) and consumes.

5. The host country benefits greatly in both social and economic terms. As an economic engine, the migrant worker has no adverse effects on economic or social conditions, or even on the labour market. Dispensing with them would be to further reduce the host country's resources. The country of origin also benefits in that one of its nationals, if not a whole family, enjoys a decent income ... provided that the migrant worker actually enjoys all his rights in the host country.

6. Rather than speaking of tolerance, it would be more appropriate to think in terms of partnership and collaboration. This could have appreciable effects on the status of migrant workers and would pave the way for international agreements, genuine cooperation and above all, in the interest of migrant workers, agreements on social rights such as unemployment benefits or, more importantly, health and retirement rights.

7. In conclusion, then, we suggest that consideration be given to establishing an international convention guaranteeing migrant workers' rights in both the country of origin and the host country, regardless of the country from which those rights derive, along the lines of specific existing bilateral agreements.